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SUBJECT: BELARUS: VICTORY DAY "IN THE FACE OF TODAY'S THREATS"

Charge and Others Lay Wreath at Victory Square

¶1. (SBU) Charge attended the official May 9 ceremony marking the 63rd anniversary of Allied victory in Europe. Participating in a wreath-laying ceremony with the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and the Ambassadors of Russia, Serbia, and Vietnam, Charge was able to closely observe Lukashenko and his cabinet. Later, following previous practice, Lukashenko shook the hands of all diplomats present (who were lined up in rough protocol order), but Charge did not engage him in conversation. The Belarusian leader looked somewhat old and tired but walked steadily, had a firm grip, and seemed to be generally in good spirits.

Luka Honors Veterans, Warns of Threats

¶2. (U) Immediately following the wreath-laying, the dictator gave a brief speech along the path he has traveled before, highlighting the sacrifices of the soldiers and the loss of one-third of the Belarusian population during the war, saying that "we will never forget the victims who paid for our victory." He commented further that "certain countries that think themselves superpowers allow themselves to interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign states and use military force as the final word. The NATO bloc is increasing its activity, recruiting new members from among former socialist states. Elements of the U.S. strategic missile defense system are being deployed at the center of Europe. Someone is trying to revise the outcome of the Second World War and redraw the map of Europe."

¶3. (U) With U.S. sanctions clearly in mind, Lukashenko added that "There have been many attempts to dictate and use economic blackmail against a sovereign and independent Belarus. However, nobody and nothing can make us divert from the path we have chosen and surrender to somebody else's will."

Parading the Glories of Belarus

¶4. (U) As in previous years, the wreath-laying and speech followed a parade along Minsk' main thoroughfare, Independence Prospect. Lukashenko and his two adult sons led the parade, walking in front of twelve cars bearing Second World War veterans. The streets were lined with members of the Komsomol-successor Belarusian Republican (State) Youth Union (BRSM) and other sympathetic citizens waving the regime's green and red flags. The celebrations in Minsk and all major regional cities of Belarus received wide coverage from the state-run media.

Comment

15. (SBU) A number of diplomatic colleagues expressed their pleasure at seeing the United States take part in the ceremonies, and commented that their GOB contacts were observing Charge's participation with interest. If there is no other benefit, the event served to underline that despite the many steps the regime has taken against us the U.S. Embassy is still open for business.

MOORE
CLOUD